

Message Text

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ACTION NEA-10

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FM AMEMBASSY COLOMBO

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 3535

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C O N F I D E N T I A A L COLOMBO 3197

EO 11652: GDS

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SUBJ: MALDIVIAN ENVIRONMENT CHANGES: DEVELOPMENTS SINCE
PM ZAKI'S OUSTER

REF: COLOMBO 963 (NOTAL; COLOMBO 720 (NOTAL)

1. SUMMARY: OUSTER OF PRIME MINISTER ZAKI IN MARCH
1975 HAS LED TO STRUCTURAL CHANGES IN MALDIVIAN
GOVT WHICH REINFORCES PRESIDENT IBRAHIM NASIR'S
ALREADY PARAMOUNT POSITION. MALDIVIAN ECONOMY,
WHICH WAS SUFFERING FROM HIGH WORLD PRICES AND POOR
FISH CATCH YEAR AGO, SEEMS TO BE DOING BETTER. GOM
IS ACTIVELY SEEKING PROPOSALS FOR PRIVATE FOREIGN
INVESTMENT IN SEVERAL AREAS IN HOPES OF DIVERSIFYING
ECONOMY.

2. WITHDRAWAL OF BRITISH FROM STAGING FACILITY ON
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GAN ISLAND IN SOUTHERNMOST

ADDU ATOLL WILL

MARK END OF 100 YEARS OF DOMINANT BRITISH INFLUENCE
AND COULD POSE MAJOR PROBLEMS FOR GOM IF STANDARD

OF RAF'S LOCAL EMPLOYEES LIVING FALLS DRASTICALLY.
NEGOTIATIONS ON WITHDRAWAL ARE NEARING COMPLETION WITH
HMG PLANNING HALT TO GAN OPERATIONS BY DECEMBER 31
AND COMPLETE PULL OUT BY APRIL 1, 1976. HMG MAY BE
WILLING CONTINUE ECONOMIC ASSISTANCE CURRENTLY
PROGRAMMED AT UPPER LIMIT OF POUNDS 500,000 OVER 3(4\$63-4 .
SINCE BRITISH ANNOUNCED THAT THEY PLANNED TO WITHDRAW
FROM GAN ABOUT ONE YEAR AGO, DIPLOMATIC ACTIVITY BY
OTHER NATIONS HAS INCREASED. IN ADDITION TO BRITISH,
INDIAN, PAKISTANI, SOVIET, AUSTRALIAN, JAPANESE AND,
MOST RECENTLY, IRANIAN OFFICIALS ARE AMONG THOSE WHO
HAVE TRAVELLED TO MALE. FOLLOWING FAIRLY HIGH LEVEL
OF VISITS IN 1974, SOVIETS HAVE NOT HAD ANY VISITS
TO OAU KNOWLEDGE IN
1975. MAIN CONCERN OF INDIA AND
PAKISTAN, AS WELL AS SRI LANKA, IS TO ENSURE THAT NO
SINGLE REGIONAL POWER OBTAINS DOMINANT POSITION IN
MALDIVES. FACT THAT OUTSIDE PRESSURES CAN AFFECT
GOM IS DEMONSTRATED BY ITS BREAKING OF RELATIONS WITH
ISRAEL LAST APRIL IN RESPONSE TO AJ
C THREAT TO
BOYCOTT MALDIVIAN MERCHANT SHIPPING. AMBASSADOR HOPES
TO VISIT MALDIVES SOON TO ESTABLISH RELATIONSHIP WITH
OFFICIALS OF REVAMPED MALDIVIAN GOVT AND TO
OBTAIN FIRST-HAND ASSESSMENT OF CURRENT SITUATION.
END SUMMARY.

3. AS RESULT PRESIDENT NASIR'S OUSTER IN MARCH 1975
OF PRIME MINISTER ZAKI, WHO IABSTILL HELD ON
PRISON ISLAND, NASIR HAS STRUCTURALLY CONCENTRATED
MORE POWER IN HIS HANDS ALTHOUGH HE HAD ALWAYS BEEN
CONSIDERED IN DE FACTO CONTROL. MINISTRIES OF HOME
AFFAIRS, FISHERIES, FINANCE, EDUCATION AND
EXTERNAL AFFAIRS WERE CHANGED ON MAY 19 TO DEPTS
UNDER OFFICE OF THE PRESIDENT. THREE FORMER
MINISTERS ARE NOW VICE PRESIDENTS IN CHARGE OF
DEPTS: IBRAHIM SHIHAB (HOME AFFAIRS),
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AHMED HILMY DIDI (FISHERIES), ABDUL SATTAR (FINANCE).
THEY ARE JOINED BY HQ MANIKU AS VICE PRESIDENT IN
CHARGE OF TOURIST AND TRADE MATTERS. EDUCATION AND EXTERNAL
AFFAIRS HAVE BEEN TAKEN OVER BY PRESIDENT. REMAINING
MINISTERS ARE UNCHANGED EXCEPT ADNAN HUSSAIN, FORMER
EDUCATION MINISTER WHO AGAIN BECOMES ATTORNEY GENERAL.

4. EXPLANATIONS OF AZAKI'S OUSTER INCLUDE: ZAKI DID
NOT KEEP PRESIDENT NASIR INFORMED OF WHAT HE WAS DOING;
PRIME MINISTER ZAKI HAD SOLD OUT TO INDIANS IN RETURN
FOR ACCEPTING PREEMINENT INDIAN PRESENCE
IN MALDIVES,
E.GJK. ESTABLISHMENT OF STATE BANK OF INDIA OFFICE IN

MALE; ZAKI WAS TAKING SOFT LINE WITH BRITISH IN
NEGOTIATIONS RE HMW WITHDRAWAL FROM GAN
WHEREAS NASIR
WANTED (AND IS NOW TAKING) HARDER LINE; AND, FORMER
PRIEM MINISTER COMPLAINED TOO LOUDLY THAT PRESIDENT
NASIR AND HIS BUSINESS TYCOON COHORT, ALI MANIKU
WERE KEEPING ALL EARNINGS FROM LUCRATIVE TOURISM
AND SHIPPING ACTIVITIES TO THEMSELVES AND LEAVING
NOTHING FOR ZAKI TO RUN GOVT WITH. ALL
EXPLANATIONS MAY HAVE SOME TRUTH IN THEM.

4. REPORTS FROM OFFICIAL VISITORS ARE THAT THE ECONOMY
HAS IMPROVED OVER LAST YEAR WHEN MALDIVES WAS
HARD HIT BY SHARP INCREASES IN OIL AND FOOD PRICES
ON WORLD MARKET, WHILE TUNA SATCH, ON WHICH
MALDIV

N ECONOMY RELIES, WAS VERY POOR. DECREASE
IN WORLD FOOD PRICES AS WELL AS IMPROVED FISH
CATCH HAVE AMELIORATED SITUATION SOMEWHAT.

6. MOST RADICAL STANCE IN MALDIVIAN CIRCUMSTANCES
WILL STEM FROM BRITISH DECISION TO CLOSE DOWN ITS
RAF STAGING FACILITY ON GANADU ATOLL. BRITISH HIGH
COMMISSIONER TELLS US RAF PLANS TO
CEASE OPERATIONS THROUGH GAN ON DECEMBER 31 AND
PLANS TO HAVE EVERYONE OUT OF GAN BY APRIL 1, 1976.
THIS WILL END ONLY CLOSE POLITICAL LINK GOM HAS
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WITH OUTSIDE POWER, WILL MARK END OF CENTURY OF
BRITISH INFLUENCE IN MALDIVES. IT COULD ALSO RAISE
POTENTIAL SECURITY PROBLEMS AMONG INHABITANTS OF
SOUTHERN MOST ADDU ATOLL, WHO HAD PREVIOUSLY TRIED
TO REBEL IN 1958, IF THEIR STANDARD OF LIVING IS
ADVERSELY AFFECTED BY WITHDRAWAL. NEGOTIATIONS
FOR BRITISH WITHDRAWAL ARE NEARING COMPLETION.
MALDIVIANS WANTED HMG TO CONTINUE PAYING,
EMPLOYEES FOR NEXT 10 YEARS. BRITISH HIGH
COMMISSION TELLS US HMG TURNED THIS DOWN AND
OFFERED CONTINUED ECONOMIC ASSISTANCE, BUT AS
SEPARATE OFFER. WE ARE TOLD HMG MAY BE WILLING TO
CONTINUE ASSISTANCE AT CURRENT LEVELS, TARGET FIGURE
OF 500,000 POUNDS STERLING RELEASED IN 3-YEAR
TRANCHES. HOWEVER, GOM HAS HAD SOME DIFFICULTY IN
COMING UP WITH PROJECTS BRITISH WERE WILLING
TO SUPPORT
AND TARGET FIGURE HAS NOT BEEN REACHED. BRITISH
INTEND TO TURN OVER AIRFIELD COMPLEX ON GAN TO
MALDIVIANS, BUT, AS HMG UNDERSTANDS MALDIVIANS DO
NOT INTEND USING GAN AS AIRFIELD, IT WILL NOT BE
LEFT IN OPERATIONAL CONDITION AND GOM MAY MOVE

ITEMS FROM GAN TO OTHER ATOLLS.

7. MALDIVIANS ARE ALSO FEELING OUTSIDE PRESSURES WHICH HAVE AFFECTED THEIR PREVIOUS POLICY OF FRIENDLY RELATIONS WITH COUNTRIES WHICH DESIRE THEM. IN APRIL 1975, MALDIVIANS BROKE RELATIONS WITH ISRAEL. ACCORDING TO AH NIDI, THIS WAS DUE TO THREAT FROM ARAB COUNTRIES TO BOYCOTT MALDIVIAN SHIPS IF THIS ACTION WAS NOT TAKEN. AS 46-STRONG MALDIVIAN SHIPPING FLEET IS VERY ACTIVE IN PERSIAN GULF AND ARABIAN TRADE BUT NOT AT ALL IN ISRAELI TRADE, DECISION IS NOT SURPRISING.

8. SINCE BRITISH ANNOUNCED INTENTION TO WITHDRAW FROM RAF GAN ABOUT YEAR AGO, THERE HAS BEEN INCREASE IN OFFICIAL VISITS FROM VARIOUS COUNTRIES TO MALE. MANY COUNTRIES HAVE PRESENTED GIFTS (E.G. PRC RADIO SETS) TO GOM DURING VISITS. SOME COUNTRIES HAVE CONFIDENTIAL

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HAD SMALL AID OR TRAINING PROGRAMS FOR MALDIVIANS FOR SOME TIME SUCH AS AUSTRALIA, SRI LANKA, US, AS WELL AS UK'S AND UN'S LARGER AID PROGRAMS FOLLOWING BIRTH'S ANNOUNCEMENT INDIANS AND PAKISTANIS SEEMED MOST ACTIVE.

9. INDIANS ESTABLISHED STATE BANK OF INDIA BRANCH IN MALE (ONLY BANK IN MALDIVES), AGREED TO ASSIST WITH FISH PROCESSING PLANT IN FADIFFOLU ATOLL AND DISCUSSED CIVIL AIR LINK WITH ESTABLISHMENT OF MALDIVIAN CONSULATE IN BOMBAY. SINCE PRINCE MINISTERS REMOVAL INDIAN ACTIVITY SEEMS TO HAVE DIMINISHED SOMEWHAT. PAKISTANI AMB REPORTEDLY

TOLD US HE FEELS GOM, WHICH IS 100 PERCENT MUSLIM, IS NOW MORE FAVORABLY DISPOSED TOWARD PAKISTAN AND OTHER MUSLIM COUNTRIES. #3 :853 & 9.'S BREAKING OFF RELATIONS WITH ISRAEL IN APRIL, GOM'S DECISION TO JOIN ISLAMIC FOREIGN MINISTERS CONFERENCE (BUT WITHOUT REPRESENTATION), WILLINGNESS TO ALLOW PAKISTAN'S HABIB BANK TO OPEN BRANCH IN MALE AND WILLINGNESS TO HAVE PAKISTAN INTERNATIONAL AIRLINES ASSIST AIR MALDIVES IF CEYLON AIR FORCE SHOULD DROP OUT OF PICTURE. AT RECENT COLOMBO PLAN BUREAU MEETING, PAKISTAN WAS ONLY COUNTRY TO SUPPORT MALDIVIAN CANDIDATE FOR VACANT INFORMATION OFFICER POSITION.

10. GTG'S CURRENT DIPLOMATIC STRATEGY APPEARS TO REFLECT GOM'S DESIRE TO REPLACE FORMER BRITISH

PRIMACY WITH BALANCE OF FORCES DRAWN FROM AS MANY COUNTRIES AS POSSIBLE. TO THIS END, GOM IS SEEKING ASSISTANCE, OFFICIAL AND PRIVATE, FROM VARIETY OF SOURCES. THIS MAY ALSO BE ONE REASON WHY GOM IS SENDING DELEGATION TO UNGA THIS YEAR AFTER TWO-YEAR PERIOD OF NO REPRESENTATION (COLOMBO 3183).XOLAST MAY, NEWLY-CREATED FOREIGN INVESTMENT DIVISION OF DEPT OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS ISSUED ADVERTISEMENT ACTIVELY SEEKING PRIVATE FOREIGN INVESTMENT AND SET OUT LIBERAL INCENTIVES FOR SUCH INVESTMENT. FOUR-CONFIDENTIAL

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MAN IRANIAN DELEGATION, VISITED MALDIVES IN MID-AUG AND, ACCORDING TO FRENCH AMB WHO WAS IN MALE AT TIME, IRANIANS AGREED TO PROVIDE ONE MILLION DOLLARS IN ASSISTANCE TO GOM AND TO CONSIDER OIL ON CONCESSIONAL TERMS. BRITISH SOURCE BELIEVES ONE MILLION DOLLARS FROM IRAN IS FOR PROJECT ASSISTANCE. FRENCH ALSO TELL US GOM ASKED THEM FOR ASSISTANCE IN FAMILY PLANNING, MARINE ENGINEER TO HELP REPAIR MERCHANT SHIPS AND REFRIGERATION PLANTS TO PRESERVE FISH. FRENCH INDICATED THEY MIGHT HELP ON FIRST TWO REQUESTS BUT COULD ONLY LOOK INTO THIRD REQUEST.

11 AMB VAN HOLLEN, WHO HAS NOT VISITED MALDIVES SINCE JULY, 1974, PLANS TRIP TO MALE IN LATE OCTOBER OR EARLY NOVEMBER. PURPOSE WILL BE TO CALL ON PRESIDENT NASIR WHO WAS NOT AVAILABLE DURING 1974 VISIT BECAUSE OF ILLNESS, TO MEET MEMBERS OF RECONSTITUTED GOVT AND OBTAIN FIRST-HAND ASSESSMENT OF CURRENT SITUATION. AMB WILL PRESENT MOON ROCK AND MALDIVIAN MOON FLAG TO NASIR. HE ALSO PLANS DISCUSS QUESTIONS OF POSSIBLE MALDIVIAN CANDIDATES IN CIVIL AVIATION TO ATTEND AMERICAN UNIVERSITY IN BEIRUT UNDER AID FUNDING. ALTHOUGH VISIT MAY GENERATE ADDITIONAL REQUESTS FOR ASSISTANCE, BELIEVE THESE CAN BE HANDLED WITHOUT MAJOR PROBLEMS. VAN HOLLEN

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